



FACT SHEET

Providing Safe Drinking Water in America: 1996 National Public Water System Annual Compliance Report and Update on Implementation of the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments

Safe drinking water is the cornerstone of public health protection, and one of the primary goals of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to ensure safe drinking water for all Americans. The Clinton Administration has always recognized that many tools and resources are essential to meet this goal and, in 1993, proposed sweeping revisions to the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). In August 1996, Congress adopted, and President Clinton signed into law, amendments to the SDWA that include both additional funding and tools to ensure drinking water meets all health standards.

This first report, now required annually under the new amendments, covers 1996 and portrays the compliance rates of drinking water systems with EPA regulations in the year before the new SDWA requirements began to take effect. In the two years following the 1996 amendments, EPA reports significant progress in implementing many of the new provisions, including this report to the public.

The report also highlights many of the accomplishments in the last two years under the 1996 SDWA Amendments, which will in turn increase compliance rates in the future.

Accomplishments

Public Right-to-Know: In August 1998, EPA finalized a rule to require drinking water systems to provide annual Consumer Confidence Reports to consumers on the quality and source of their drinking water. EPA has been working over the past year to make drinking water information available to the public via the Internet (<http://www.epa.gov/safewater>).

Funding: The Amendments created the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund to enable states to help water systems finance infrastructure improvements that are needed to solve compliance and public health problems. Congress has appropriated \$2 billion for the Fund through September 1998, and all States are on track to receive funds.

Small Systems: In order to help small (serving less than 10,000 people) water systems comply with public health standards, EPA published guidance and information to help states create a program that gives small systems the technical, financial, and managerial capacity to provide water that meets federal health-based standards. EPA also issued a list of compliance technologies for small systems, giving them flexibility in choosing the most cost-effective way to achieve and maintain compliance. EPA will soon require certification for operators of small systems.

Strong Science: In February 1998, EPA published its Contaminant Candidate List, which is a list of currently unregulated contaminants that are known or anticipated to occur in drinking water. This list will allow EPA, states, tribes, and water systems to focus their efforts on contaminants that pose the greatest

risk to public health.

Enforcement and Compliance Assistance: The SDWA Amendments provided stronger enforcement and penalty authorities. In addition to state actions, EPA issued 1,300 notices of violation, over 600 administrative compliance orders, and over 50 administrative penalty complaints in 1996 and 1997.

Significant Findings

The Safe Drinking Water Act defines a *public water system* as one having 15 service connections or regularly serving 25 people at least 60 days out of a year. All systems are either *community* (serving the same people year round) or *non-community* systems. There are two subsets of non-community water systems, *non-transient* (schools, factories, etc.) and *transient* (rest stops, restaurants, etc.).

EPA, along with its state and local partners, is initiating several steps to improve the data describing drinking water, to ensure that it is of higher quality and increased reliability.

The following results are based on data from 1996, before the SDWA Amendments were implemented:

- The nation's drinking water is generally safe -- 86 percent of the country's population served by community water systems drank water from systems that reported no violations of health-based standards.
- 94 percent of all public water systems had no reported violation of health-based standards.
- Nationwide, 87 percent of all violations are of significant monitoring and reporting requirements. Failure by public water systems to monitor is an important violation since it can mask public health problems.
- 82 percent of health-based violations were in small systems serving fewer than 3,300 people each.
- Although the number of large systems with health-based violations is fewer, the population that is served by these systems can be large.
- Approximately ten percent of public water systems located on Indian reservations had a reported violation of a health-based standard. However, 45 percent of these systems reported significant monitoring and reporting violations.
- Compliance data in many individual state databases differs from that reported to the federal database.

Recommendations

- EPA and states should continue to vigorously address violations of health standards, treatment technique requirements and significant monitoring and reporting requirements.
- EPA should work cooperatively with public water systems on Indian Reservations to improve compliance with monitoring and reporting requirements.
- EPA and states should work cooperatively to improve the quality of compliance data, facilitating better linkages of federal and state databases, forming a task force to recommend ways to improve

data quality, and undertaking more frequent verifications of drinking water data.

A copy of the complete report is available at <http://www.epa.gov/safewater> or at <http://www.epa.gov/oeca> or by calling EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline 800/426-4791.